



The Center to Advance Manufacturing Monthly News

April 2025

Northwest Ohio directly employs over 108,000 people* in manufacturing, including 43,000 in the automotive sector. Virtually all of these firms are grappling with serious challenges—from workforce shortages to supply chain management and the growing demand for innovation. However, the automotive industry is facing even greater disruption, with shockwaves increasing in both magnitude and frequency, transforming products, processes, and long-term strategies.

Given the critical role automotive manufacturing plays in our regional economy, we believed it was essential to closely examine the sector's current state. We partnered with the Center for Automotive Research (CAR)—with funding from the Ohio Department of Higher Education—and engaged all 17 county economic development organizations served by the Regional Growth Partnership to conduct a comprehensive study of Northwest Ohio's automotive manufacturing landscape.

The study focused on three principal components:

Awareness of the Industry: In collaboration with local Economic Development Organizations, CAR developed an inventory and map of 230 automotive manufacturing facilities employing approximately 43,000 workers. This was achieved by combining industry databases with the local insights of economic development professionals across the 17 counties.

Assessment of the Industry: CAR applied its proprietary risk profiling tool to identify risks and opportunities based on the type of production at each facility. This analysis considered key external factors, including federal policy, electrification trends, energy usage, automation levels, and workforce preparedness.

Actionable Recommendations: CAR surveyed companies, conducted seven one-on-one management interviews, surveyed local economic developers, and facilitated two focus groups. Drawing from this feedback and assessment, CAR developed a set of actionable recommendations to help retain, grow, and, where needed, diversify the region's automotive manufacturing base—while also enhancing workforce development strategies.

In the coming months, we'll take a deeper dive into each component of the automotive study through our monthly newsletter, highlighting key insights, challenges, and opportunities uncovered in the research. We also plan to host roundtable discussions with regional partners to explore the findings collaboratively and identify practical next steps.

In the meantime, you can access the Executive Summary [here](#) and watch a recording of last month's webinar on the study [here](#).

As always, we welcome the opportunity to meet with you to review the study and discuss how the findings may inform strategies for your organization. Please feel free to reach out at any time.

Thank you for your continued partnership and commitment to advancing Northwest Ohio's manufacturing future.

- The Center to Advance Manufacturing Team

**Source: Lightcast*

- *Manufacturing our future* -



Northwest Ohio Innovation Consortium Glass Center of Excellence Grand Opening

Center staff members Kassie Cooper, marketing projects manager, and Ford Weber, program manager, were proud to attend the grand opening of the Northwest Ohio Innovation Consortium's Glass Center of Excellence — a significant step forward in positioning Northwest Ohio as a global hub for glass science and innovation.

This public-private partnership brings together leading companies and academic institutions, including two of our key collaborators, Bowling Green State University and Owens Community College. The initiative aims to drive cutting-edge research, workforce development, and technological progress in the glass and solar industries.

We extend our congratulations to all involved in launching this transformational effort.



NOIC President Roger Smith addresses attendees during the grand opening celebration of the Glass Center of Excellence.

Northwest Ohio Regional Economic Development Annual Meeting

The Center to Advance Manufacturing team attended the Northwest Ohio Regional Economic Development Association (NORED) Annual Meeting, a valuable gathering focused on regional collaboration, strategic planning, and economic impact.

We were pleased to host a table and welcome several colleagues from Hancock County to join us for the event. Key highlights included the presentation of the Flame Award to Wood County's Rex Huffman and a compelling keynote address by Don Iannone, who explored the transformative potential of artificial intelligence in economic development — from business attraction and site selection to workforce strategy.

The event brought together leaders from across the region for thoughtful discussion and shared vision.

Patrick Sadowski (Eastman & Smith), Kassie Cooper (Center to Advance Manufacturing), Jeff Shrader (F&M Bank), and Tim Mayle (Gilbane) at the NORED Annual Meeting.



Northwest Ohio Manufacturing Alliance Quarterly Meeting

The Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce's Northwest Ohio Manufacturing Alliance (NOMA) held its latest meeting at The Andersons, Inc., bringing together regional partners and educators to spotlight career and technical education (CTE) efforts across Northwest Ohio.

The meeting featured strong participation from local school districts and CTE programs, all working to expand hands-on learning opportunities and strengthen the region's future talent pipeline.

Sara Swisher, vice president of talent and workforce at the Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce, shares updates on NOMA initiatives during the meeting.

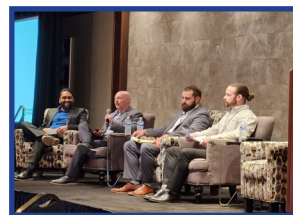


Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments Transportation Summit

Cooper and Jeri Steinbrook, Center workforce training coordinator, attended the 2025 Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (TMACOG) Transportation Summit, where innovation and infrastructure took center stage.

Sessions explored a range of topics—from smart construction materials to emerging trends in regional mobility—highlighting how advancements in efficiency, safety, and sustainability are reshaping the movement of people and goods.

These developments have direct implications for Northwest Ohio's manufacturing ecosystem, supporting supply chain reliability, workforce mobility, and long-term regional growth.



Rajesh Nagisetty (TMACOG) hosts a panel of experts on innovative materials and methods, featuring Jay Whitt (Heidelberg Materials), Danny Dymarkowski (Foundation Steel), and Andrew Schulte (Transportation Research Center).

Cooper and Steinbrook representing the Center at the TMACOG Transportation Summit.



Aligning Education with Industry: Whirlpool Collaboration Continues

The Center continues to strengthen its partnership with Whirlpool Corporation through a series of productive conversations focused on workforce development and educational alignment.

This month, Center staff and representatives from our partner schools — Bowling Green State University, Owens Community College, and the University of Findlay — returned to Whirlpool's Findlay plant for a second collaborative meeting. Discussions built on February's visit and explored next steps for sustained training partnerships, including opportunities to support leadership development, project management, and technical skill-building.

We appreciate Whirlpool's continued engagement and look forward to working together to develop tailored training solutions that meet evolving industry needs.



Supporting Owens Community College Student Success Through Mock Interviews

This month, the Center participated in virtual mock interviews hosted by Owens Community College to help prepare students in the school of business for future career opportunities. Our workforce training coordinator, Jeri Steinbrook, joined industry and community partners in offering feedback and guidance to students as they practiced their interviewing skills and provided feedback on their resumes. We're proud to support efforts that build confidence and career readiness among the region's future workforce.

Webinar Recap: Controlling Energy Costs in Manufacturing

Rising energy and capacity prices are putting pressure on manufacturers — but what's driving the trends, and how can businesses respond? In our latest webinar, Omar White (Constellation Energy) and Huck Hayes (Alternative Energy Source) broke down the PJM system, explained capacity market dynamics, and shared practical strategies for managing energy costs.

If you missed the live session, the recording is now available on our website. You can view this webinar and access all past sessions [here](#).

University of Findlay Supply Chain Students visit GROB Systems

The second visit in a series of industry site tours—coordinated by the Center in collaboration with Dr. Ekpen Owie, Assistant Professor of Supply Chain at the University of Findlay—took students to GROB Systems in Bluffton, Ohio.

The visit began with a presentation from GROB's Training Manager, who shared insights into the company's operations and provided an overview of its apprenticeship program, which plays a key role in developing technical talent. Students also heard from GROB's Procurement & Logistics Director, who gave an inside look at the company's purchasing and logistics strategy. He explained how roles such as buyer, procurement clerk, and logistics analyst support GROB's customer-driven, project-based approach.

The visit wrapped up with a plant tour led by a current apprentice, giving students a firsthand look at advanced manufacturing in action. These real-world learning experiences continue to help students connect classroom knowledge with practical applications in the field of supply chain management.



Pictured: UF supply chain students with Danielle Sidebottom, Center assistant to the ED, during the facility tour.

Society of Manufacturing Engineers Fusion Conference

Center staff Steinbrook and Weber attended the Society of Manufacturing Engineers (SME) Fusion conference, a dynamic gathering focused on advancing workforce strategies in manufacturing — from filling the talent pipeline to upskilling the current workforce.

SME is a national leader in promoting manufacturing innovation and talent development. Their mission aligns closely with the Center's work to strengthen industry partnerships and build a future-ready workforce in Northwest Ohio.

The event featured a range of insightful presentations, interactive workshops, and engaging panel discussions. A standout moment was the keynote by Jeannine Kunz, who shared actionable strategies for developing a modern, resilient workforce. Other sessions explored ways to reimagine traditional hiring, integrate AI into workforce engagement, and enhance collaboration between education and industry.

The Center team looks forward to applying key takeaways to further support our regional mission in advancing manufacturing talent.

Bowling Green State University Forms Strategic Partnership to Advance AI in Manufacturing

Bowling Green State University (BGSU) recently signed a collaborative agreement with Kata Solution and IoTco, forming a strategic partnership to drive AI and smart technology integration within Ohio's advanced manufacturing sector.



Pictured: IoTco Managing Partner Mo Abuali, Kata Solution President Bryan Little, BGSU College of Engineering and Innovation Dean Wael Mokhtar, and BGSU President Rodney Rogers

This partnership brings together university innovation and industry expertise to support workforce development, pilot emerging technologies, and further strengthen Ohio's leadership in manufacturing. With a focus on student preparation, leadership development, and digital transformation, the initiative reflects BGSU's ongoing commitment to aligning education with industry needs and fueling regional economic growth.

The Center is proud to be part of this important initiative, which directly aligns with our mission to bridge education and industry through innovation, workforce advancement, and strategic collaboration.

For full details, click [here](#).

Celebrating Emily Weiland's Impact and Graduation

This month, we celebrate the accomplishments of our Graduate Assistant, Emily Weiland (*pictured right*), who will graduate with her Master of Science in Applied Statistics from Bowling Green State University in early May.

Over the past two years, Emily has been an integral part of the Center's work, using her analytical expertise to support data-driven initiatives with regional manufacturers. Her contributions — ranging from tracking employment trends and import data to analyzing TechCred usage and generating monthly reports — have directly informed conversations with industry partners and helped guide strategic decisions. We are grateful for Emily's dedication, insight, and professionalism, and we wish her the very best in her next chapter.



Looking ahead, we are pleased to share that the Center has hired a new graduate assistant for the 2025–2026 academic year. We look forward to continuing our commitment to providing real-world learning opportunities for students while advancing workforce and manufacturing initiatives across the region.

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